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## Eine Initiative zum Schutz und zur Erforschung von Landschildkröten in Bulgarien

### *An initiative for preservation and research of Land Tortoises in Bulgaria*

#### **Abstract**

The region of Eminska Mountain is quite suitable for various studies and actions involving tortoise research and conservation. The results may be used as a base for long term scientific programs and to accompany and supplement the actions for preservation of both species in the rest of the country. Priority conservation measures have to be performed in territories with stable future status of protection.

The activities of the ex-situ centre are unfortunately the only one of its kind in Bulgaria. In 2005, on behalf of the Bulgarian Herpetological Society, an official note was submitted to the Environmental Ministry with a claim for legal recognition and official support of the centre, as a specialized centre for land tortoises. There was detailed explanation and argumentation of the necessity for founding such a centre. It was pointed that the centre already exists and is functioning successfully, but to gain official status requires the state's permission and support. Unfortunately, the answer from the Ministry was negative with no serious argumentation why. All the activities performed by the centre until now are the result of only one person's effort, and so the centre's continued existence remains uncertain. The overall conclusion of the work conducted to date is not in positive for the Bulgarian scientific community, nor for the government authorities.

As a further attempt to continue efforts in favour of land tortoises and to find another way, independent from the apparently indifferent Bulgarian authorities, in April 2007 I founded the first NGO in Bulgaria, which is dedicated and specialized in tortoise and turtle conservation – „Gea Chelonia Foundation“. Through this organisation, my goals are to attract attention from similar organizations in other countries, to introduce their experience in my country, in order to bring Bulgarian tortoise conservation measures to an adequate level. I hope to achieve this together with those who love chelonians and are dedicated to explore and save the wild populations of some of the earth's most endangered species.

#### **Key words**

Testudines: Testudinidae, *Testudo hermanni*, *Testudo graeca*, Bulgaria, preservation

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